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C O N F I D E N T I A L CARACAS 002388

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/20/2017

TAGS: PREL ASEC PGOV VE

SUBJECT: CHAVISTA GOVERNOR LEADS PROTEST AT U.S. EMBASSY

Classified By: Robert Downes, Political Counselor,
for Reason 1.4 (D).

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: Cojedes State Governor Jhonny Yanez Rangel led a small and peaceful protest on December 20 in front of the U.S. Embassy against the arrest of three Venezuelans implicated in the Antonini "valijagate" case. Governor Rangel held a press conference outside the mission and read aloud his "Chronology of Terror" regarding the arrested Venezuelans. After presenting a protest letter to the PAO, Rangel, his roughly 250 fellow protesters, and the media departed. The peaceful protest appeared as either a side-bar or was incorporated into coverage of the Antonini trial in most major media the following day. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) Venezuelan Governor Jhonny Yanez Rangel led a caravan of approximately 80 vehicles and 250 persons to the U.S. Embassy at about 1:00 p.m. on December 20. Rangel and his supporters said they were protesting the arrest of three Venezuelans accused of acting illegally as unregistered foreign agents in the Antonini "valijagate" case. They also claimed to be defending "the honor and sovereignty of Venezuela and Argentina." Rangel read to the media present his document, "Chronology of Terror, a little Guantanamo in Miami," as well as a letter to Ambassador Duddy. Both items were faxed to the Venezuelan desk.

¶3. (SBU) The letter called on the United States to respect the leadership, self-determination and integration of Latin America; cease the campaign of judicial terrorism against legitimate Venezuelan businessmen; cease the media attacks against himself, his wife and daughters. (Note: Rangel told the media that he objects to the wide media circulation of a photograph of Antonini with Governor Rangel taken at the Alternative Energies Summit in Uruguay in 2006. Rangel argues that such photos are part of USG efforts to connect Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela officials to Antonini. End Note). After presenting his documents to PAO, Rangel answered additional questions from the press and the crowd peacefully dispersed.

¶4. (SBU) In addition to live press coverage, news of Rangel's protest appeared in most December 21 editions of local newspapers as either a side-bar or incorporated into broader coverage of the hearings in Miami. The local media gave wide coverage to the Ambassador's December 20 comment, made during a charity event at a local hospital, that the trials were "purely judicial."

¶5. (C) Comment. Cojedes Governor Rangel is an ardent Chavista from a strongly pro-Chavez state in western Venezuela. In 2006, 73% of Cojedes voters voted for Chavez; 61% voted for

Chavez' constitutional reforms. He is likely carrying water for President Chavez rather than responding to any real political fallout in his state. Rangel notified the Embassy in writing of his planned protest the day before and made good on his pledge to keep the event peaceful. End Comment.

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